

The price of sunlight

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The price of sunlight

by [Searofyr](#)

Summary

From the journal of Salyn Darovi, no title, Clockwork City 2E.

As Sotha Sil's pointedly unofficial right-hand mer, Salyn tries to improve the food situation in the city. But people don't function as reliably as Dwemer contraptions.

Chapter 1

So we got some of those Dwemer suns from Blackreach installed, most of them in the Everwound Wellspring, at last, so they can get started on growing things other than half-dead mushrooms now; not least finally a chance for me to make up for the decision I made there back then, which haunts me to this day and has to lead to some kind of payoff, somehow. Now it did.

One sun ended up in our private place's basement, cause I've been complaining about the lack of light to read, and this is Sil's response.

He also clearly just enjoys having the thing there. I can see it; its mere presence brings on this undercurrent of amusement and dare I say glee. So I can't say anything now. It's adorable.

Well, at least it's bright now.

First we had to adjust the things to fit our purposes, and you'd think, how hard can it be to make an exaggerated lamp work the right way? But then you try to deal with the magic of an actual artificial sun. And then you're drained to Oblivion and back. Not if you're Sil, but if you're me. I still have my limits. But we managed. Took a while.

Chapter 2

I should refrain from efforts in the future.

I took a habitual tour around the poorer areas and the black market today. Wish I hadn't. On the black market, the merchants complained to me that ever since we started having legitimately grown greens, the prices for their slightly less legitimate imports were down, and we were destroying their livelihood.

Exactly what we needed.

In Slag Town, they complained that with the higher-ups focusing on greens and the black market merchants being less generous, they now get barely any donations but flavourless paste, but that in abundance, and they're sick of it.

I told some of them that people in Tamriel would like to have their problems. Maybe not so diplomatic. Normally it's only Apostles that annoy me that much.

Chapter 3

A guy wants to open a gourmet restaurant in town, but the bureaucracy is interfering with its regulations. Both sides want me to make the other see sense.

I don't see any sense anywhere.

Chapter 4

So we need a new hunting decree and stricter laws because with the new focus on real food, there's been excessive hunting of the fabricants outside the fortress.

Chapter 5

I've been getting competing demands for hunting regulations by Slag Town hunters, Apostle hunters who want strict quota, a newly formed Association for the Protection of Fabricant Life, who want to ban hunting altogether, the also newly formed Brass Fortress Food and Gastronomy Association, who want equal distribution of hunting rights, and a few stray Apostles who want to grow fabricant flesh without the inconvenient and aggressive by-product of sentient life that comes along with whole fabricants. Oh yeah, and a few novice hunters died to some kagouti fabricants out there, and some people are upset, because hunting kagouti when you've got no idea what you're doing is certainly a great idea.

I hate to say it after all this time and fuss and effort, but I suspect Sil was right all along. There's something to be said for flavourless paste and asceticism for all.

Damn it all.

Chapter 6

I got home after another of those days and found Sil sitting at our large work table, scribbling on assorted documents aligned all over the surface. He looked up at me with a smile.

“The old-fashioned way today?” I asked.

“Yes. You have complaints.”

“Not about you,” I hurried to say. Can’t let him think that for even a moment.

“No. But about the city. More than usual.” He’d heard it all day after day, but today I really was reaching my snapping point.

I sighed. “You were right, and I was wrong. This whole food project wasn’t just a waste of time and effort, it was a terrible idea.”

“Sit with me and talk.” Sil indicated the space on the bench next to him, and so I sat and gave him the whole litany of complaints and a list of all the idiocy that was assembling.

He listened, amusement in his eyes. When I was done for the moment, he said, “You brought change, and the people like it.”

“Well, I hate it. Wish I could undo it all. Bring back the paste for all. Just shut down the Wellspring. Inject all the fabricants with poison when eaten by our kind. Ban everything. Fuck this all, what a terrible idea.”

His smile grew, and he leaned against me. Just like that, without further comment.

I wrapped my arm around him, looked at him, and eventually had to smile as well. Just a bit. “So. You’re not terribly fazed, are you.”

“You make me happy.”

Well, damn. “Then it’s all worth it,” I grumbled, or tried to, but couldn’t manage a straight face.

Sil turned and kissed me. “But you’re right. We will need centralised food distribution, and hunting laws. This is a lesson that I wish wasn’t so, and I tend to forget once in a while. But they always remind you. You can’t leave people alone to be sensible on their own. I wish we could.” He sat up straight, took a quill and tapped it against his chin thinking. “What are your personal wishes for the hunting issue? You want strict regulation, don’t you?”

“Yeah. I love those creatures.” I kissed his shoulder. “And they’re yours. At the same time, Slag Town has always had meat from what they could get, and they’re just the ones that are obvious; whoever could afford to pay for it, you bet they did. And I like some once in a while; part of life. So, some kind of strict regulation that leaves most of the fabricants alone but still leaves some meat available and doesn’t starve the poor people. And the issue got much worse after so many greens were available, so one seems to cause the other. Maybe some overall rationing, paste most of the time, the rest... somehow restricted...”

“You understand already.” Sil gave me a sly side glance. “Did you ever think you’d turn so authoritarian?”

I had to laugh, a painful laugh. “No. It’s all I never wanted to be.”

“Neither did I.”

“Our old dilemma.” I caught a strand of his hair and wrapped it around my finger.

He leaned just slightly closer. “Yes, there it is again.” Looked into my eyes, leaned in further. “But we were thinking about new laws, weren’t we?”

“Were we?” I sighed and let go of him with great willpower. “Right. By the way.”

He waited.

“Slag Town. We need to do something about that. Food is first, yeah, but their education. The whole thing. There’s...”

Sil broke into another smile. “What else did you find?”

“So we’re not in rural Stonefalls. This is Clockwork City. I think all the grown-ups should be able to tell the difference between a statistics collector and an oracle. Doesn’t matter if a statistics collector happens to have an oracle side function. That’s just... Something has to change.”

Sil let out that silent laugh of his, looking down at the desk, then side-eyeing me, and laughing again. “You may have a point. We will look into it. So you’ve found those. I’d all but forgotten. And you found out how to use them?”

“Yeah, but...”

“What did it say?”

“Oh, that was a good one. It was overtaxed with me. Could have figured, if even you are, but I tried anyway, cause I was curious. It said some cryptic lines and that it was processing, and then it said: ‘I see... serpents. Lord Seht. Displaced. Error. Conquest. Error. Serpents. Snow. Lord Seht. Error. Alignment error.’ And then it shut itself down again.”

He grew serious at that, just regarded me silently for a while with narrowed eyes, then another smile grew on his face. “I see,” he said. Watched me again, took my hand and kissed my fingers and held on to it with that content expression like that’s his now (and it is), set out to say something else but didn’t.

“Good?” I just asked.

“Yes.”

“And will you disassemble some of that for me? I mean, I’ve got my own associations, given my chosen family, but...”

“They’re much the same as mine. As for any further ideas... I can’t yet. It’s too fragile. I can’t be sure, and I shouldn’t say anything more.”

Predictable enough. “What about that part...”

“I won’t be aligned away from you,” he said because he knows me. “Or displaced from you. At all, no matter what.”

“Know me too well, don’t you?”

“I do. And not yet well enough. But know this, you’ve already won. Any ‘displacement’ could only be further towards you. The factotum's complaints are about different matters.” He leaned in and lowered his voice. “I’m yours. That is absolute.”

I kissed him right away because I had to, and all further elaborations followed later.

Chapter 7

Time's passed.

We have hunting and food distribution and rationing laws in place now. They function somewhat. Everyone complains, so I guess that means it's a success. Flavourless paste is back to being the available standard, with the rest as an add-on. Never thought I'd be so relieved at that. And the improvement that's there is enough.

Sil showed me the initial text asking for any wishes and commentary before it went into place, which I really appreciated. The text was long. Really long. Took me a while to work through. In the end I had no complaints at all.

For some reason I recall Divayth telling me a while back not to let them tame me here.

Too late.

But that's alright. This is what I wanted. Or rather, I took and got what I wanted, and I'm happy to live with the consequences, even the unlikely and unexpected ones.

Even the really stupid ones.

All the effort of getting those things from Blackreach, only to advocate for flavourless paste. Sil, this is all your fault. Look how you make me think. (Don't stop; I don't want to live in a world in which everything is not your fault.)

[Added in a different, old-fashioned handwriting]

Likewise. And likewise, everything is your fault.

Don't stop either.

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